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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, NEA/PPD, NEA/P, AND IIP/G/NEA

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [SOCI](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: OMAN ONLINE: SUICIDE, SHEIKAHS, AND STRIKES

1. Summary: The Omani Internet message board "al-Sablah" is the liveliest and most comprehensive Arabic-language forum for political and social discourse in the country, touching on issues and personalities rarely addressed in the conventional media. While not totally free, nor wholly reflective of Omani public opinion, this popular site nevertheless offers a worthwhile window into the hot topics and unvarnished views of the day. This edition of Oman Online contains the following topics:

- "Suicide" Vs. "Martyrdom"
- The Existence of American Troops in Oman
- Alleged Corruption of Minister of Crafts Industries
- Strike in Salalah Port

End summary.

Suicide Vs. Martyrdom

2. Participants in al-Sablah noted how Oman's daily youth-oriented "Al-Shabibah" newspaper described the attackers of the Israeli town of Netanya as "suicide bombers" rather than "martyrs." Of the 859 participants who viewed this topic, 59 responded to it. The topic then turned to a discussion of the bombing itself; roughly 60 percent opposed the Netanya attack. Some described it as "a crime to give the Israelis an excuse to continue swallowing more territories and their revenge attacks against innocents." Others saw the attack as un-Islamic, and challenged Muslims who defend it to bring "one Quranic verse or legitimate proof from Islamic teaching showing that killing innocents is legal." Still others urged the tactic of peaceful resistance, which they saw as underlying the success of the first Palestinian Intifadha.

Baseless Charges

3. The question of American bases in Oman generated 2,354 hits and 39 responses. Al-Sablah members were divided in their opinion. Many did not strongly oppose the American military presence in the Sultanate. They cited an assessment from the Congressional Research Service that "No American troops exist post 9/11 in Oman except for a few facilities and equipment." Many users also agreed that "Americans are using Omani facilities only as part of bilateral agreements." They added that "The Omani government has signed a treaty with America limiting the American military to the use of Omani facilities and equipment, only 24 bases, and thus Americans in this condition are using Omani bases rather than their own."

4. Others, however, strongly opposed any American military presence in Oman, noting that "American bases existed during the war against Afghanistan and Iraq or at least they used Omani bases to attack Iraq." They asked, "Why should our country provide any logistical support to attack another country?" One member stated that "the [Omani] government does not take into consideration what its people want, it only obeys mamma America."

All In The Family

5. The alleged corruption of female Omani minister Shaykhah Aisha bint Khalfan al-Siyabiya, in charge of craft industries, generated 7,779 hits. The 178 responders castigated the minister "for hiring and giving her in-laws priority in all the benefits she gets from her position." Responders discussed the minister's latest scandal, in which she allegedly contracted with one of her relatives to offer a course in how to make the traditional Omani ceremonial dagger, the "khanjar," at a cost of 2000 Omani riyals (approximately \$5200) to each student in a class of twenty.

6. This topic in turn led to complaints about how the minister's husband has benefited from his wife's position. One response asked how her husband advanced from a BMW salesman to a high level official in the Royal Diwan in less than one year. Some responders complained that Sultan Qaboos himself appointed her husband to that position per her request. An overwhelming number of participants complained that such behavior is ruining the whole political system; one member stated, "This is against human rights because if human rights existed in this country...she would have not been appointed to that position in the first

place."

Strike One

17. Al-Sablah's report of a strike in Salalah's port generated 10,558 hits and 203 responses. According to al-Sablah, "an Omani employee (Salim Al-Ma'ashani, head of the marketing department) punched an expatriate who was at first assumed to be an American, but who was in fact South African. The expatriate provoked the Omani employee by firing him and then demanding that he leave the premises. Other Omani employees upon hearing the incident supported Al-Ma'ashani, since he is a popular figure in the company who always fights for their rights."

18. Other respondents chimed in. "The Omani employees called for a strike, and the port's activities were at a standstill and in confusion for almost 72 hours, forcing 24 ships to divert to other destinations." The striking Omani workers demanded the termination of the expatriate, not only for disrespecting Al-Ma'ashani and insulting him but also for insulting all Omanis. Some al-Sablah users claimed that the expatriate demeaned Omanis, saying, "You people don't understand anything."

19. According to al-Sablah, the strike ended following a long meeting between five representatives of the Omani workers and the regional sheikhs of Dhofar, the Deputy Governor of Dhofar, and several high-ranking ministry officials. One al-Sablah response reported that the Omani employees resumed their duties on the condition that Al-Ma'ashani be reinstated and that the company management respect their grievances.

BALTIMORE